DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 132 065 SO 009 566

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TITLE Dimensions of Children's Classroom Behavior as Perceived by Teachers.
PUB DATE Apr 75
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Denver, Colorado, April 1975); For related documents, see ED 114 337 and SO 009 567

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavioral Science Research; *Classroom Observation Techniques; *Comparative Analysis; Educational Psychology; Educational Research; Elementary Secondary Education; Factor Analysis; Rating Scales; Research Design; *Research Methodology; Sex Differences; Statistical Analysis; *Student Behavior; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to ascertain which dimensions of children's classroom behavior are seen to be important by teachers and how accurate teachers' perceptions are of children's behavior in terms of such dimensions. Teachers in six suburban fourth-grade classrooms rated classroom behavior of each of their students (105 boys and 78 girls) using 5-point scales to rate 30 items. Five factors were identified which can be categorized as relating to either "task" or "social-emotional" aspects of behavior. The factors are (1) autonomous intellectual orientation; (2) democratic, cooperative behavior; (3) perseverant achievement behavior; (4) involvement in class activities; and (5) undisciplined activities. Girls were found to be more cooperative, better behaved, and harder working than boys, a finding corroborated by other studies on sex differences among elementary school children. Negative and positive correlations between teachers' rating factors and other indices of children's orientations, values, and achievement-related indices provide evidence that teachers' perceptions of their students form clear and coherent dimensions which, when compared with other measures of similar orientations or behaviors, appear to be quite accurate. (Author/AV)

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ED132065

SRCD paper
April, 1975

Dimensions of Children's Classroom Behavior, as Perceived by Teachers

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Teachers' impressions, perceptions and opinions of children probably have important effects on children's lives during the school years, and may also, in some instances, have more long-lasting effects which extend beyond childhood. Furthermore, since elementary teachers are typically in contact, or at least in proximity with children for a substantial portion of their week-day waking hours, they would seem to be in a good position to make accurate observations of children's behavior, at least as manifested in the academic group settings represented by schools. Yet little is known about which basic dimensions of children's classroom behavior are seen to be important or salient by teachers, or about the general accuracy of teachers' perceptions of children's behavior in terms of such dimensions. These are the central questions addressed in this study.

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Teachers in six suburban fourth-grade classrooms (including four which also contained third graders) made ratings of the classroom behavior of each of their students, using 5-point scales to rate 30 items. Each teacher was asked to rate each student relative to the other students in her classroom and to rate all students on one item before going on to the next. Among the items were "perseveres with tasks," "socially involved, accepted," "physically active," "willing to compromise," "strives to achieve," "skilled at problem-solving," "cooperative, helpful," and "curious about many things."

There were 183 children in the sample, 105 boys and 78 girls.

The ratings were factor analyzed, and rotated to orthogonal simple structure. Five factors were obtained, and given the following names:

1) Autonomous intellectual orientation (with high loadings for "curious about many things," "sets problems for self," "reflective, thinks," "skilled at problem-solving," and "strong interests in many areas," among others);

2) Democratic, cooperative behavior; social maturity (with high loadings for "respects others' opinions," "respects others' rights," "tolerant of differences," "concerned for welfare of others," "willing to compromise," and "cooperative, helpful," plus others);

3) Perseverant achievement behavior (with high loadings for "perseveres with tasks," "strives to achieve," and "works well without rewards or praise," plus others);

4) Involvement in class activities (high loadings for "enjoys class," "socially involved, accepted," "involved in class activities," "much benefit from class," and "competitive," plus others); and

5) Undisciplined activity (with moderate loadings for "physically active" and "undisciplined").

These factors can be categorized in a general way as relating to either "task" or "social-emotional" aspects of behavior. Two of the factors, 1 and 3, refer to the child's approach to academic/intellectual tasks. They distinguish between ~~children who are~~ intellectually motivated and work on topics which ~~they find~~ intrinsically interesting, and ~~those who~~ simply work hard in the classroom, presumably on whatever ~~they are~~ assigned. These two factors bear some resemblance to the distinction between "achievement via independence" and "achievement via conformance" put forth by Gough some years ago. The other three factors seem to refer to more general aspects of classroom social behavior and comportment and refer to characteristics not necessarily limited to academic or intellectual

situations.

Significant sex differences were found for the factor scores on three of these factors. Girls' scores were significantly higher than boys' scores for "democratic, cooperative behavior" and "perseverant achievement behavior," and significantly lower than boys' scores for "undisciplined activity." These findings, that girls were more cooperative, better behaved, and harder working, are in agreement with other findings on sex differences among elementary-school-age children.

Measures of a number of cognitive, motivational, and attitudinal constructs were also obtained from the children in the study. Among these were achievement test performance, inquiry skill, creativity, achievement motivation, fear of failure, locus of control, democratic values, preference for cooperation vs. competition, decision-making autonomy, concern for others, self-esteem, social desirability, value on group activities, tolerance for differences, intrinsic motivation, personal expression vs. structured role orientation, bureaucratic orientation, and locus of instigation (a measure of one's belief that he is generally responsible for initiating his own activities). These measures were not seen by the teachers.

Correlations between each of these measures and scores on the five teacher rating factors are shown in the table.

The most interesting set of contrasts shown in this table is that between the correlates of the two achievement-related factors, 1 and 3. Several types of measures are represented on the left of the first page of the table. Some refer to general orientations toward achievement-related tasks and situations--"achievement motivation," and "fear of failure" (it would perhaps be more accurate to call this measure, "avoidance of situations of possible failure"); some suggest achievement

orientations with a more autonomous flavor--"intrinsic motivation," "preference for task self-direction"; some refer to beliefs about personal control and autonomy--"locus of control," "locus of instigation," "decision-making autonomy"; and perhaps "personal expression orientation"; and some refer to orientations toward adult authority--"bureaucratic orientation," "social desirability." All of these are characteristics which seem to fit logically with the name and interpretation of the first teacher rating factor, "autonomous intellectual orientation"--and virtually all of them (with the exception of I-) correlate significantly with that factor (either for one or both sexes, or the total). None of them correlate significantly with the third teacher rating factor, "perseverant achievement behavior." In fact, none of the individual measures of children seem to represent this characteristic directly. However, there is a very high correlation (.65) between this rating factor and the measure of achievement test performance, shown on the second page of the table. Achievement test performance also correlates with factor 1, but not to the same degree.

The measures of creativity and inquiry skill (also shown on the 2nd page) correlate more highly with factor 1 than factor 3, while both also show significant correlations with democratic values, and factor 1 does with "tolerance for differences." While these last two findings are somewhat puzzling, the others seem coherent and consistent, and seem to provide evidence for the validity of these teacher rating factors as descriptions of student behavior. Thus, children rated high on "autonomous intellectual orientation" are generally oriented toward independent and autonomous achievement-related activities, are intrinsically motivated, have feelings of personal efficacy, and show creativity and inquiry skill; while those rated high on "perseverant achievement behavior" show very good achievement test performance (which presumably requires just such diligent

consistent classroom work) as their one very salient characteristic. Perhaps if some of the other children's measures referred directly to striving behavior, rather than orientations, attitudes, values, etc., there would have been further evidence for the distinction between these two factors.

The measure of self-esteem also correlated significantly with each of these two factors, but in each case with a different sex. The correlation was significant for girls with "autonomous achievement orientation" and for boys with "perseverant achievement behavior." Although we don't want to make too much of this, it is interesting to speculate on the possibility that in each case self-esteem may be correlating with the type of achievement (or orientation) which is relatively more opposed to the sex-role stereotype.

The teacher rating factor, "democratic, cooperative behavior" shows one of more significant correlations with the three most relevant individual measures, "democratic values," "preference for cooperation," and "tolerance for differences" (girls only), but also with three others; creativity and inquiry skill (boys), and fear of failure (girls). Thus, this factor also seems to show a fair degree of validity, but it is not as clear-cut as it is with factors one and two.

The other two teacher rating factors represent qualities which had no parallels among the individual child measures. They nevertheless show some significant correlations. "Involvement in class activities" correlates significantly with "bureaucratic orientation" for both sexes, and with creativity for boys. Bureaucratic orientation involves compliance and orientation toward adult authority, qualities which may help impel children toward classroom involvement; the correlation with creativity is more puzzling.

The factor, "undisciplined activity" shows negative correlations with intrinsic motivation and decision-making autonomy, and a positive one with social

desirability. The first two of these suggest that "undisciplined" children have relatively little internal achievement-related motivation; the third, that they show (or state) compliance with adult values. All are fairly low, however.

These results provide evidence that teachers' perceptions of their students form clear and coherent dimensions which, when compared with other measures of similar orientations or behaviors, appear to be quite accurate. While, as pointed out, we did not have measures which corresponded with the last two factors, it might be expected, based on the results with the first three, that correlations with appropriate measures would show evidence of similar accuracy. This suggests that teacher ratings, at least when combined into global dimensions, can be considered a feasible way to obtain measures of child classroom behavior.

Correlations Between Teachers' Ratings Factors and Other Indices of Children's Orientations, Values, and Achievement-Related Indices

Other Indices		Teachers' Ratings Factors: Autonomous Intellectual Orientation	Democratic, Cooperative Behav.	Perseverant Achievement Behavior	Involvement in Class Activities	Undisciplined Activity Lev.
Sex (M=1, F=2)		-.08	.30**	.26**	.03	-.28**
Achievement Motivation	boys	.21*	.07	.04	.07	-.18
	girls	.28*	.09	-.13	.10	.07
	tot.	.23**	.09	.00	.08	-.11
Fear of Failure	boys	-.22*	-.02	-.09	-.10	.08
	girls	-.19	-.22*	-.04	.06	.02
	tot.	-.21**	-.09	-.06	.08	.05
Intrinsic Motivation	boys	.28**	-.10	-.16	.10	-.18
	girls	.41**	.17	-.01	.05	-.03
	tot.	.32**	.03	-.07	.08	-.15*
Total IAR (loc. of control)	boys	.15	.16	.06	.00	.13
	girls	.18	-.05	.05	.01	.13
	tot.	.15*	.12	.08	.01	.09
I+ (resp. for successes)	boys	.17	.15	.10	.04	.15
	girls	.30**	-.06	.09	-.02	.03
	tot.	.21**	.10	.11	.02	.08
I- (resp. for failures)	boys	.07	.11	.00	-.04	.06
	girls	.00	-.02	-.01	.03	.18
	tot.	.03	.09	.02	-.01	.07
Locus of Instigation	boys	.10	-.02	.03	.05	.17
	girls	.29**	.18	.11	-.04	-.04
	tot.	.18*	.08	.08	.01	.06
Bureaucratic Orient. (SEPS)	boys	-.31**	.19	.04	.25**	.05
	girls	-.35**	-.07	-.10	.31**	.10
	tot.	-.33**	.11	.00	.27**	.05
Personal Expression Orientation	boys	.14	-.16	-.04	.05	-.13
	girls	.16	.04	-.05	-.09	-.17
	tot.	.15*	-.09	-.05	-.01	-.13
Social Desirability (CSD)	boys	-.35**	.16	.01	.06	.20*
	girls	-.32**	-.10	-.16	.18	.17
	tot.	-.33**	.05	-.06	.10	.18*
Pref. for task self-Direction	boys	.13	-.05	.05	.09	.08
	girls	.17	.00	-.11	.00	-.03
	tot.	.15*	-.02	-.01	.05	.03
Decision-making Autonomy	boys	.22*	-.06	-.12	.06	-.09
	girls	.20	-.21	.02	-.09	-.28*
	tot.	.22**	-.14	-.10	.00	-.08

Correlations with Teachers' Ratings Factors (Continued)

Other Indices		Teachers' Ratings Factors: Autonomous Intellectual Orientation	Democratic, Cooperative Behavior	Perseverant Achievement Behavior	Involvement in Class Activities	Undisciplined Activ. Lev.
Self-esteem	boys	-.03	.16	.25**	.06	.06
	girls	.30**	.03	.15	.20	-.01
	tot.	.22**	.07	.31**	.06	.14
Achievement Test Performance	boys	.35**	.04	.63**	-.21	.01
	girls	.39*	-.05	.65**	-.13	.05
	tot.	.33**	.09	.65**	-.19	-.03
Creativity	boys	.27*	.19	-.18	.29*	.10
	girls	.28	-.02	.07	.04	.06
	tot.	.21*	.23*	.05	.18	-.02
Inquiry Skill	boys	.10	.32**	.04	.08	-.01
	girls	.31	.01	.00	.19	.05
	tot.	.16	.23*	.07	.11	-.02
Democratic Values	boys	.30**	.12	.23*	.00	-.05
	girls	.18	.04	.19	-.04	-.08
	tot.	.22**	.16*	.26**	.00	-.13
Pref. for Cooperation (vs. compet.)	boys	-.13	.15	-.03	-.11	.01
	girls	.14	.12	.17	.14	.20
	tot.	-.06	.21**	.10	-.02	-.02
Tolerance for Differences	boys	.29**	-.08	.02	-.05	-.05
	girls	.30**	.23*	-.05	.01	-.03
	tot.	.28**	.07	.04	-.03	-.09
Value on Group Activities	boys	-.01	.02	-.14	-.05	.11
	girls	-.16	.18	.02	.06	.11
	tot.	-.07	.11	-.05	-.01	.07
Concern for Others	boys	.18	-.02	-.18	.09	-.04
	girls	.02	.14	.04	.01	.20
	tot.	.10	.09	-.05	.06	.00

Note: Ns for Achievement Test Performance, Inquiry Skill, and Creativity -- boys=56, girls=36, total = 92. Ns for all other variables -- boys=105, girls=78, total = 183.

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$